

Pam-Biog Lyon 3

A SKETCH OF
MARY LYON

By **I S A B E L H A R T**



Price, Two Cents

Woman's Foreign Missionary Society
Methodist Episcopal Church
36 Bromfield Street, Boston, Mass.

MARY LYON

"Their works do follow them."

IN studying the history of strong and noble lives, they will frequently be found crystallizing around some central thought or purpose, which if we may discover we will have found the keynote by which those lives were toned and tuned.

Florence Nightingale, when asked the secret of her heroic achievements, said, "It only shows what God can do with an ordinary woman, who never says no to him in anything." And Mary Lyon who sent out from the influence of her teaching over three thousand Christian women and workers, many of them to be light-bearers in the dark places and uttermost parts of the earth, said, toward the close of her grandly useful life, "*There is but one thing I fear in all the universe, that I shall not know all my duty or fail in doing it.*" She sought by all the means open to her to know all of God's will concerning her. And knowing this, she was true, and brave, and persistent in following its leadings. She was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. This tells the whole story.

Mary Lyon was born in Buckland, Mass., February 28, 1797, of sterling, sturdy, pious New England stock. From early years she evidenced remarkable mental activity, with ardor in the acquisition of knowledge, and a memory retentive of these acquisitions. As she grew older, working and teaching alternated with her studies, that she

might have the necessary means for their further prosecution.

Of the highest type of teachers it is somewhat true as of poets — they are born, not made. Such a teacher was Mary Lyon. She magnified her calling. In it she glorified her Father, and, as always follows, he glorified her. Thoroughness of instruction, firmness with gentleness of discipline, a loving spirit, beauty of life, bore their appropriate fruit in the type of womanhood moulded by her formative hands.

Six years were spent at Ipswich in delightful association with her loved friend, Miss Grant, and in labors which brought their rich reward in the honor accorded her, in the affection she won, and above all in the young women growing into well-developed Christian characters and going out into positions of usefulness in the Master's vineyard.

It was not easy to resign a position so secure, associations so congenial, work so satisfactory: and yet, if anywhere was a post where she was more needed, and of greater difficulty to fill, work whose scope would be larger even if its exactions would be greater — if anywhere in the teaching field there was greater want, and for herself greater usefulness — that, Mary Lyon knew, was her place.

That place and that work were very clearly revealed to her. It should be the foundation of a permanent seminary, large in its scope, small in its cost, high in its aims, through which the hundreds now deprived of the highest educational advantages because of their expense might obtain them. A seminary which should afford the best advantages of intellectual culture at smallest cost,

and should be most distinctive in the consecration of all its teaching and association and influence to the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom. Mental culture of the best was to be furnished, but mental culture not as an end, but as a means, that thereby those receiving it might be fitted for higher usefulness and better service.

But how was this conception to be embodied and this purpose materialized? Mary Lyon was no enthusiast, or rather her enthusiasm was of the type that clarifies the brain and energizes the will, that stimulates to earnestness of action, and dedication of self. She had learned the obedience of faith and the patience of hope. Believing the work to be of God, and herself called to do it, looking to him she at once sought the means through which it must be matured.

Several things were necessary. Funds were to be collected for the erection and furnishing of buildings, that should be placed in the hands of trustees of broad and liberal views, who would take supervision and responsibility in the matter. Teachers of like spirit with herself must be found who would work from the same high plane of motive for the same high ends, and with small consideration for salaries. Pupils who would be willing to live simply, and be economical in all their expenditures, doing all the domestic work, for economy's sake first, and also because of the practical benefit to themselves, and that independence of servants might be maintained; and all were to live together and work together in the true missionary spirit, in the spirit of self-denial, each looking not on her own things, but also on the things of others.

Did all this seem Utopian? The world has

frequently found that the dreams of lofty spirits have become the most substantial and saving facts in its history.

Miss Lyon had but small funds and few friends of influence and means. But her human capital was the strong confidence of the communities in which she had lived and taught, and the thorough devotion of the young women who had been under her care, and her reserve force was faith in God. It would be interesting to note how this great enterprise grew; how wisely Miss Lyon planned; how earnestly she toiled; how she traveled, and wrote, and pled, and prayed; and how one after another of true, staunch friends were enlisted; how first believing in her they were led to believe in the work she represented — how godly men, who held themselves stewards of the Lord's funds came to see in it the Lord's work, to which their funds and their personal service were cheerfully devoted; how pious women put in it of their hard earnings and savings; how her former pupils rallied around her and her work.

We may not note all the steps in this process, from September 6, 1834, when a few gentlemen gathered in the private parlor at Ipswich to devise ways and means for founding a permanent female seminary upon principles and for purposes in harmony with her views, to October, 1836, when the cornerstone was laid—to November 8, 1837, when with a glad, grateful heart, she opened its doors to receive the students who so eagerly came to share its benefits.

Probably the distinguishing features of the school — distinguished it above all others of which I have any knowledge — were the frequent, genuine, general revivals of religion which were longed

and looked and labored for with an intensity which, rightly studied, would do much to solve the mooted problem how to promote revivals? Secondly, that thorough missionary spirit which was only the complete logical development of the principle on which the school was founded — the greatest service to the greatest number in the greatest need — and as the outcome of which, nearly a hundred graduates of Mt. Holyoke have been found in our various mission fields.

These revival seasons — it would be blessed to trace their genesis and progress and results. Few could say with the emphasis and fullness of meaning of Mary Lyon — “I believe in the Holy Ghost,” and few have that simple reliance on prayer as the certain means of securing a manifestation for Him. All the schedules of regular school time and work were arranged with reference to this — the silent-hour morning and evening, devoted to meditation and prayer — the recess hour, when pupils voluntarily gathered in the rooms of the various teachers for brief, simple, devotional services — the rich exposition of Scripture that Saturday and Sabbath, and thrice during the week, came from the earnest study and loving heart of the Principal. These were in the regular order, and all hearts thus prepared, how naturally came those remarkable seasons of grace which year after year swept the school.

Of course, missionary zeal could not fail to be the outcome of such culture, such consecration, such revivals; and so speedily it became the very nursery of missionaries. Missionary meetings were regularly held with the two-fold purpose of giving information concerning the cause and of stimulating to gifts of substance and of self: Mary

Lyon's own soul was aflame with missionary zeal. Few appeals have been more fervent than the "Missionary Offering" that came from her pen, of which she said she wrote of it because her heart was so full that she could not but write.

The young women at Mt. Holyoke were generally from families of small means — as it was established for the benefit of such. The salaries of the teachers varied from \$125 to \$200, Miss Lyon herself absolutely refusing to receive more than the latter amount — even while her ability in planning, managing, financiering, teaching, would have commanded the highest salary. But from those thus conditioned the annual missionary offering was from \$600 to \$1,100. The luxury of doing good in this way they could not dispense with. But these are the least gifts made by the institution to the missionary cause. Continually there have been going out from its doors its daughters, pervaded with its spirit, carrying therefrom that spirit and to a degree reduplicating its work in the remotest parts of the earth. The first year one of the number went to Zulu, Africa. Every senior class for more than fifteen years had one or more representatives in the mission field. To none was accorded higher usefulness and honor than to Fidelia Fiskè, who went thence to Oroomiah, Persia, in 1843. Her associate, Miss Rice, came from the same school, with the benediction of the same teacher, in 1847.

In the records of 1846 we find the simple notice, "Miss Abigail Moore, Miss Lucy Lyon, and Miss Martha Chapin were transferred from their work in the seminary to the more needy field in Asia. They had for some years engaged in aiding others to prepare for the work of the Lord among the

heathen. They now entered on it themselves. The two latter were affectionate and beloved nieces of Mary Lyon."

One feature of the seminary was the constant communication kept up with these, its living links, in various lands. A journal was kept of the doings there and copies sent to these far-off daughters, while from them would come back letters from the wilds of America, from the islands of the sea, from Persia, India, China, Africa — an electric chain binding closely together these scattered forces, and binding all to a common center — Christ.

March 5, 1849, Mary Lyon closed her earthly career. Those who were with her most intimately noted how she was ripening, not knowing it was for glory.

The end crowns the work. But the end is not yet. Not until the records of all time, made up from all lands, are written — not until from the East and West and North and South are gathered those saved through her instrumentality and through the instrumentality of those whom she trained, and those trained by them to remotest ages; not until the farthest wave of influence shall have struck on the shores of eternity, can the complete crown of honor and rejoicing be put upon that humble, devoted life, whose wisdom was in turning many to righteousness, and whose glory was to so train them that with like wisdom they might engage in like work. Until then her stars remain uncounted. Yet here and now may we read — three thousand women thus taught; scores of missionaries thus sent. Surely the noblest inscription is what her stone records:

"Give her of the fruits of her hands and let her own works praise her in the gates."